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The Vanderbilt University Department of Art in association with The Office of Arts and Creative Engagement, present *Idle Chatter*, a new work by The Art Guys. [<http://TheArtGuys.com/IdleChatter.html>]

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Who: The Art Guys [<http://TheArtGuys.com>]

What: Art exhibition and “audience participation audio/phone sculpture”

When: Tuesday, March 22-April 5, 2011; exhibition opening and reception Tuesday, March 22, 4-6 p.m.

Where: Space 204, Vanderbilt University Department of Art [<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/arts/>]

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Idle Chatter is an audio sculpture that invites students and from all over Vanderbilt campus, and audiences from all over the world, to participate.

Participants are invited to call a prescribed number – 615-343-7000 – at anytime and from anywhere. This telephone number, provided by the university, connects callers to an extension inside Space 204 in the E. Bronson Ingram Studio Art Center of the Vanderbilt Art Department. When connected, the voices and

sounds of these callers are broadcast live throughout the gallery space from digital answering devices set on speaker mode. Callers may say or do anything they wish. They are in control, they are the exhibition, this is their soapbox.

Idle Chatter addresses and plays with the phenomenon of the ubiquity of telephones in everyday life. The materials of this sculptural arrangement are the ephemeral voices and sounds of the callers which are transmitted from remote locations to the exhibition space. The intention is not to create a dialog. The devices in the gallery space will not be formatted to be used by gallery visitors. Nor is the purpose of *Idle Chatter* to demonstrate the sophistication of any technology. Rather, it is to create a simple social sculpture, an electronic soapbox, a situation in which the art is shaped and determined by audience members themselves using everyday materials and techniques.

History/background, precedents

Idle Chatter is an extension of The Art Guys' investigations of audience participation media works, and specifically their experiments of telephone systems and technology, that date to the beginnings of their collaboration. For example, in 1992 The Art Guys presented fax machine piece called *Fax of Life* at The Art Guys World Headquarters. *Fax of Life* was a one-night event wherein participants – anyone from anywhere – could call The Art Guys studio number between prescribed hours during which they were connected to a fax machine. Participants were invited to send whatever they wished via facsimile. The received faxes were installed in the exhibition space as they were received thus making the show. More than 100 faxes from all over the world were received for *Just the Fax*.

Later, The Art Guys proposed *Watch What You Say* for their 1995 retrospective at the Contemporary Arts Museum. [http://TheArtGuys.com/IMAGES/Works/Drawings/Watch_What_You_Say.jpg] *Watch What You Say* proposed to tap the phone lines of the staff of the CAMH and install corresponding telephones in the gallery space so that visitors could listen in on the private conversations of the CAMH staff. This proposal was rejected and has yet to be realized.

More recently, in 2011, The Art Guys presented *Phone* at Texas Women's University in Denton, Texas as part of the exhibition "FREERIDING." [<http://www.subtextprojects.org/> , <http://www.theartguys.com/News.html>] *Phone* involved simply placing a cell phone on a sculpture stand in the exhibition space with no instructions. Audiences decided for themselves how or if to use the cell phone.

Meanwhile, audiences from remote locations could call the cell phone at any time. More than 500 documented incoming calls were received during the course of the one month exhibition.

Idle Chatter continues The Art Guys' experiments with open-ended audience situation pieces using telephone technology.

When asked about *Idle Chatter*, Jack explained, "We were invited to create a project at Vanderbilt that would be public in nature, to create a situation that would involve as many people as possible. But we also wanted to do something that would not impose ourselves into the work."

Mike added, "The logistical challenge was to engage the entire Vanderbilt campus while potentially formatting something for the Space 204 gallery in the Art Department because we wanted to try to draw audiences to that location. We think *Idle Chatter* is the perfect solution to these seemingly contradictory parameters."

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About The Art Guys

The Art Guys are Michael Galbreth (b. 1956, Philadelphia) and Jack Massing (b. 1959, Buffalo) who began working together as The Art Guys in 1983 after meeting while students at the University of Houston. Since that time their work has been included in more than 150 exhibitions in museums, galleries and public spaces throughout the United States and in other parts of the world including Europe and China. Additionally, their work has been seen in more than 40 solo exhibitions among which include the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Tacoma Art Museum, the de Saisset Museum, the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the Tampa Museum of Art.

The Art Guys have experimented with a wide range of materials and activities in their attempt to expand the dialog and boundaries of art. Sculpture, drawing, performances, installations and video are among the many

forms The Art Guys have employed, with food, drugs, pencils, baseball bats, car lot flags, toothbrushes and matches as just a small sampling of the unconventional materials they have utilized. Using an open and offbeat “direct-to-the public” methodology, they have presented their work in grocery stores, movie theaters, airports, restaurants, sports arenas and many other non-traditional venues for experiencing art while also exploiting mass media and entertainment to explore contemporary society and issues. They are perhaps most well known for their numerous staged performances, public spectacles, and “behavioral” interventions in a wide array of situations that have blurred the divisions between art and life.

Described in the New York Times as “a cross between Dada and David Letterman, John Cage and the Smothers Brothers,” The Art Guys often use humor and everyday materials as a way to demystify art in an attempt to welcome a broad range of audiences into the discourse of contemporary art. In this way their work has been compared to medieval court jesters and fools as well as noted 20th century artists like Marcel Duchamp and Dada, Fluxus artists, Andy Warhol and William Wegman among others. Theirs is a world where the everyday becomes monumental, where humor is serious, and the ridiculous meets the sublime.

Articles, reviews and stories about their work have appeared in The New York Times, The New Yorker, Wall Street Journal, Art In America, ArtNews, Artforum, Sculpture Magazine, CNN, CBS News Sunday Morning and many more.

More information may be found on their website at TheArtGuys.com.